DIRECTOR OF DEFENSE RESEARCH AND ENGINEERING
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

4 SEP 1970

Dr. Joshua Lederberg
Stanford University Medical Center
School of Medicine, Department of
Genetics
Stanford, California 94305

Dear Dr. Lederberg:

Thank you for your thoughtful letter of July 24, 1970, expressing your concern over the release of defense information. The matter of secrecy in Defense Research and Development is one to which I have devoted much time in the past year, with the help of a distinguished panel of scientists. What should be classified and what released, the timing of release, the military value of secrecy and the value of an informed citizenry in our democratic society are some of the problems we have faced. I am happy to have your thoughts on these questions.

With regard to the specific case of binary chemical weapons which you cited, the information was first released at a meeting of the Army Science Advisory Panel on February 17, 1969. I can assure you that General Stone was not the first to make public reference to this concept.

The concept of binary weapons is not a secret shared by the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. It was first shown to be feasible in Great Britain, and we know that it is well understood in countries such as Holland, France, Sweden and several Eastern European countries. This is not meant to impute any offensive development by these countries, but to establish the fact that they are aware of the possibility of binary weapons and the implications this has for defensive preparations and for arms control and disarmament discussions.

The latter consideration is especially important. It might prove very difficult for the U.S. to engage in the current chemical and biological disarmament discussions in Geneva while secretly developing binary weapons, and it could ultimately be embarrassing. Beyond that, it appears desirable that disarmament discussions should openly face the problems posed by these weapons, especially in the area of verification procedures.

Finally, while we have announced the feasibility of binary weapons, we have not provided the details of the technology necessary to produce them. This is important, not only in this case but in a larger context. In the

efforts alluded to in the first paragraph, a number of weapons were examined. In each case it was found that secrecy of only a very few of the components was critical to provide a reasonable lead-time. If our efforts can be concentrated on maintaining security of these few critical elements, then a better job of security can be done and the benefit of secrecy -- lead-time -- can be more readily attained. At the same time, more information can be made generally available with resulting benefits to technological progress and informed public debate.

These are some of the issues surrounding the judgment which you questioned. Your arguments are cogent; I hope that you will also find this attribute in ours.

Thank you again for sharing your views on this matter.

Sincerely,

John Foster J.

John S. Foster, Jr.